



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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ASIAN AUTUMN--SPLENDID VARIETY: 18TH-CENTURY ART IN JAPAN November 16, 1993 - March 6, 1994

The world-famous collections of Asian art are spotlighted every autumn at The Cleveland Museum of Art. "Asian Autumn 1993" presents an especially rich area of the Asian collections: 18th-century Japan. In **Splendid Variety: 18th-Century Art in Japan**, chief curator Michael Cunningham draws together scroll paintings, screens, and ceramics to offer an expansive view of what he calls "a time of fervent eccentricity."

Artists working in every style and material responded to the dynamic and creative impulses of a new modernism struggling to rise within a traditional society. Whether they were part of the established "school" system or felt themselves to be outsiders, all artists were propelled by the sheer force of the general ferment of the time. From every region of the country, artists were drawn to metropolitan circles of patronage in Osaka and Kyoto, the cultural center of Edo period (1615-1868) Japan. In those cities they came into contact with literary groups, philosophical societies, and all varieties of intellectual and aesthetic stimulation.

Splendid Variety offers both a vivid sense of the vitality of 18th-century Japan and a broad context for the late-18th century art coming to the Museum this winter in a major loan exhibition, **Ukiyo-e Revisited: The Floating World** (February 2-April 3, 1994). The loan exhibition will concentrate on the final decades of the century, 1780-1800, and on one of the impulses and styles so important in 18th-century Japan, that of the pleasure-driven merchant culture that was dramatically restructuring Japanese society.

Ukiyo-e artists included in **Splendid Variety** include Kaigetsudō Andō (active early 18th century), Miyagawa Choshun (1683-1753), and Kubo Shunman (1757-1820), among others. Kubo's hanging scroll, *Chinese Beauty*, offers a glamorous woman in an informal moment, vastly different from the formal, courtly dress, pose, and gesture that had long characterized Japanese

figure painting. With their images of courtesans, actors, and entertainments, these artists, all active in the first half of the 18th century, prepared the way for the "golden age" of *ukiyo-e* which will be the focus of the loan show.

Equally important in **Splendid Variety** are artists known as the "Eccentrics" or "Individualists," who delighted in the unexpected image. Soga Shohaku's (1730-1781) pair of six-fold screens, *Eight Immortals of the Wine Cup*, depicts bizarre and besotted men--bohemians in their own way--who are nonetheless appealing.

Another school, called "Nanga" (scholar painters), studied the images, subjects, and styles of earlier Chinese and Korean paintings, which had been enthusiastically collected and copied in Japan since the 15th century. Aspiring Nanga artists sometimes sold their renditions of Chinese and Korean paintings to collectors in return for room, board, and modest fees, as they studied to master the brush techniques and forms of the established traditions. Chief among the Nanga are Tani Buncho (1764-1840), Yosa Buson (1716-1783), Matsumura Goshun (1752-1811), and Ikeno Taiga (1723-1776). Taiga's two-fold screen, *Bamboo in Fine Weather after Rain*, exhibits the varied brush work in ink of the "scholarly" or so-called "amateur" painting traditions. His hanging scroll, *Kanzan and Jittoku*, is a fine example of lively brushwork in the service of humor and keen observation. Goshun is represented by several works, including a hanging scroll, *A Poetic Gathering*, which in a few daring strokes captures the physical presence and personalities of his literary friends; both Goshun and Buson wrote inscriptions on the scroll.

Goshun is also counted among the artists (called the Shijo School) whose naturalistic work is influenced by Western painting. The major figure of this group is Maruyama Okyo (1733-1795); his pair of screens--*Winter Day and Summer Night*--is evidence of the highest order of the Japanese artist's capacity to absorb "realistic" ideas into the more abstract and decorative tendencies central to Japanese art.

The decorative style, which is a major continuing tendency in Japanese art, is represented in the 17th and 18th centuries by the "Rimpa" artists. The source of their inspiration was native Japanese painting (*Yamato-e*) rather than Chinese or Korean models. Rimpa artists emphasized the visual impact of condensed designs, bright surfaces, and rich tonal harmonies. The delicate rhythms of line, form, and space joined to produce powerful designs that appeal strongly to modern taste. Chief among the Rimpa artists represented in the Museum collection and in this exhibition are Ogata Kōrin (1658-1716), Watanabe Shiko (1683-1755), and Fukae Roshū (1699-1757). Two of the most popular works in the Museum's

Japanese holdings will be in the show: Kōrin's six-fold screen, *Chrysanthemums by a Stream*, and Roshū's six-fold screen, *The Ivy Lane*, which carries the decorative tendency to dazzling extremes, particularly in the treatment of the landscape as a series of stage flats and the unusual color harmonies of blue and rust red.

Kōrin is also represented by an earthenware dish--made by his brother, the great artist Ogata Kenzan (1663-1743)--which Korin painted with a design of plovers flying over waves.

Added to the works from the Museum collection are several important pieces from an anonymous private collector.

An ambitious schedule of lectures, performances, films, demonstrations, and family programs begins with **Splendid Variety** and continues through the run of **Ukiyo-e**. Programs especially related to **Splendid Variety** are listed on the attached release.

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